THE SOURCE OF THE SEA BISHOP

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His pipe never an obstacle of conversation, Herbert Halpert is always ready and eager to discuss just about anything or everything with anyone or everyone of us, his university faculty colleagues, regardless of our discipline. One such chat in the confines of the elevator on the way up to his book-burdened domain on the top floor was really my first opportunity to have an insight into his world of folklore. The pipe bellowed up its cargo of smoke (*Revelation* mixture, I think), and he exposed to me what that day had been brought in for identification or explanation. To Herbert it was clear — the object was a Jenny Haniver. No one seems to know why these fake monsters are so called, other than that the name suggests Anvers, the French name for Antwerp. One must suppose that the Belgian city was at one time a centre for the manufacture of, or at least for the trading of, such specious marine specimens.[1]

It was equally evident to me that the Jenny Haniver held by Herbert was a fake monster, specifically, one formed from, and featuring, the dorsal surface of a dried ray. The first illustration of such an artifact is to be found in Conrad Gesner's *Historia animalium*, published in 1558. Even then, at that early date, the nature of this fraud was clearly and emphatically stated.[2] So, there was such a thing as the fake monster, the Jenny Haniver, and it has a long history. I thought no more about it. Then, my colleague, Dr. Raymond J. Clark of Memorial University's Department of Classics, brought to my attention the Russells' interesting article on "The Origin of the Sea Bishop."[3] The authors discuss mermen, mermaids, sea monks and sea bishops, and are prepared to categorize them all as equivalent to Jenny Hanivers, employing in some instances a single organism, in others, parts of more than one (and disparate forms at that) sewn together.

The Russells remind us that Guillaume Rondelet, in his *Libri de Piscibus Marinis* (1554) described both the sea monk and the sea bishop.[4] The illustrations provided by Rondelet have been repeatedly used by others.[5] Indeed the Russells found the representation of the sea bishop more interesting than that of the sea monk, the latter being considered quite ordinary and in the tradition of "mermen and mermaid imagery," that is, easily identified as a "fake monster." The sea bishop, in contrast, fuses "human and fish form in a curious and unique way," there being "something so *circumstantial* about it, so unlike the conventional composite merman image, that the question inevitably arises, was the picture based on some actual object?"[6] (See Figure 1). They conclude that Richard Carrington's[7] assumption that the sea bishop is but another example of a Jenny Haniver — "animal bodies doctored to look like imaginary or mythical monsters" — is the correct one. In support of "Carrington's imaginative hypothesis," they cite examples they encountered in references,[8] as well as those they observed in Famagusta, Cyprus, and those of their own production.[9]

It is true that the human facial features, the episcopal cope and mitre are there. The legs offer a greater problem to visualize, unless Rondelet's engraving is interpreted as showing (as expressed by the Russells and cited elsewhere here), the upper part, belonging to the elasmobranch, with the lower part being "perhaps the drumsticks of a chicken."

I do not believe that the sea bishop need be interpreted as a Jenny Haniver, or any man-made artifact for that matter. Clark's wife, Viv, observed that to one who knows squid, Rondelet's drawing of the sea bishop "*does* resemble the *body* of a squid." It does, in fact, bear great resemblance to the teuthoid cephalopod form, especially if the squid is oriented head down. Cephalopoda, the class of the phylum Mollusca to which the squids, octopods and sepioids are properly assigned, comes from the two Greek words *kephale*, head, and *pous*, foot. Literally, the functional head of the squid, with arms, tentacles, eyes, and mouth, is the molluscan embryonic or

morphological foot. By jet-propulsion, the animal can move either head (foot) or mantle (tail) (the more or less cone-shaped "body") in front. Thus, if in a drawing or photograph (as in Figure 2), the tail is toward the top of the page, the head, with its appendages, is pointed downward. Indeed, the mantle configuration can easily be interpreted as that of the traditional mitre in outline.

The very designation, "sea bishop," indicates that its holder is one in authority, of great office, and, therefore may denote a comparatively greater "size" than that of churchmen in lower orders. It came as no surprise then to find that Barber and Riches speculated that as its "legs appeared to be clad in rubber waders, — its origin was probably the cast-up body of a giant squid."[10] The key phrase here is "cast-up," for seldom have giant squids of the genus *Architeuthis* been encountered on the open sea. What is known of them and their anatomical features is based primarily on specimens washed ashore. This occurs most frequently and with a demonstrated cyclic regularity only in Newfoundland, particularly in those areas of the insular portion of the province exposed to the northeast and the open North Atlantic waters affected by the Labrador current.[11]

I have been able to secure fourteen specimens of these magnificent organisms, the longest being just under thirty feet (Figure 3). Since they wash ashore, there is always some degree of damage to the specimens thus secured. The apparatus by which the mantle 'collar' is affixed to the 'neck' is weakly developed. Therefore, the Russells' and Carrington's description of the sea bishop as having a cape falling free, as it were, would not be impossible to accommodate in such a specimen: the leading edge of the mantle may be mauled or torn free and thus loosely applied to the sides. Rocky coasts and stony shores are hard on the animals as they wash ashore and roll with the tides. Entire arms and portions of them are often missing. In short, natural forces sculpt and form the sea prelate configuration.

As Tennyson wrote of the kraken,[12]

> Then once by man and by angels to be seen
> In roaring he shall rise and on the surface die."

And once seen, as I have seen them on our shores, there was implanted in the mind of man the concept of a large, sturdy, magnificent, and mitred form, the concept of the sea bishop (or in the orient and the World of Buddhism, the sea bronze or Buddhist priest). Could it not then be that the Jenny Haniver theory of the Russells and Carrington only now applies? The carver of the fake meant to create an icon in reproduction of the prelate seen moribund on the shore, like a molluscan merman. If the Architeuthid were seen alive and active at sea, I doubt that the case I here present would hold at all. It is only in death that the *appearance* of the once-living tissues and organs would create the impression I postulate.

Horace Beck, the eminent folklorist and experienced mariner, hesitantly proposed an octopus as one of a series of possible explanations of the true nature of the merman. He recounts a seventeenth-century incident of "a creature" who, having attempted to board a boat, was repelled by the boatman, one Mr. Mitter, who cut off one of its arms. The supposed merman then sank, "dying the waters purple with its blood."[13] The blood was probably ink, a unique cephalopod product deployed in anger, fear and fright. I suggest to Beck that he would better interpret both the merman and the encounter between man and molluscan in terms of a squid, rather than an octopus. But then again, perhaps Beck does not know that there is a difference between them.

Beck is not alone here. Probably the most detailed, and in most respects, accurate account of any giant squid in literature is that in Jules Vernes' *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*. Yet Verne consistently referred to it as an octopus. They are not the same.

The pioneer in the taxonomic study of the giant squids and the author of the genus *Architeuthis* was the Danish biologist, Japetus Steenstrup. The first specimen that he

studied he named *Architeuthis dux*, the ducal or princely, majestic squid — so impressed was he by his first encounter with it. Size and stature had thus been acknowledged. It was a later specimen (1853) that he named *A. monachus*, the Greek taken directly into the Latin and denoting its life apart, alone, as if in accordance with a rule or canon of conduct and of choice — the same as a monk. Is it not possible that this taxon was in some way influenced by a memory of the dead prelate, once seen? Earliest references to the sea monk in Danish waters date to 1516 and to the SØMUNKEN which Streenstrup (1857) interpreted as a giant squid.[14] It is therefore clear that the legend of the sea monk was in his mind when he established the architeuthid taxon *A. monachus*. Ley tells us that the countries on the waters to the north of Europe, as well as Antwerp, were centres for Jenny Haniver dispersal.

My largest specimen of *A. dux* from Newfoundland bore on the tentacles suckers of approximately two inches in diameter. Suckers and their toothed armament of over twelve inches in diameter have been found in the stomachs of sperm whale as indigestible wastes. The Architeuthid that bore these suckers would have been over 150 feet in length.

I suggest, therefore, a new order, the sea archbishop — the scientific designation: (upon first capture) *Architeuthis halpertius*.

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Figure 1
The Sea Bishop, as illustrated by G. Rondelet (1554).

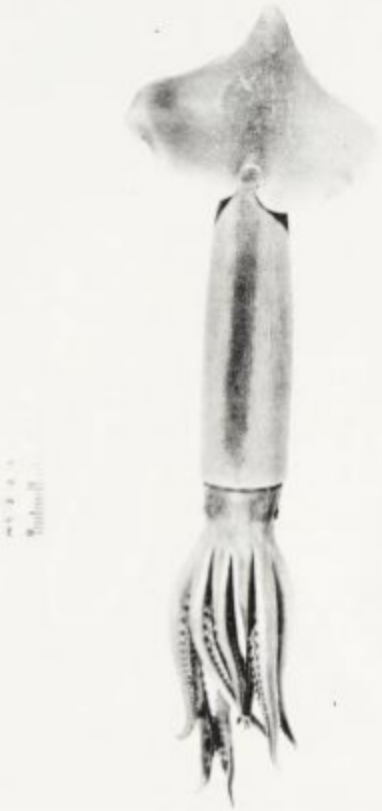

Figure 2

Dorsal view of a specimen of the Newfoundland bait squid, *Illex illecebrosus* Lesueur.

Figure 3

Specimen of *Architeuthis dux* Steenstrup, from Bonavista, Bonavista Bay, Newfoundland, 1975.

NOTES

[1]Willy Ley, *Exotic Zoology* (New York, 1959), pp. 45-47. An excellent account of how the normal morphological features of the ray (genus *Raja*) can easily be converted into the humanoid configuration of the Jenny Haniver.

[2]Ley, p. 47. Ley quotes Conrad Gesner as follows:

> Apothecaries and other peddlers change the bodies of rays in many ways after their own fancy by cutting, twisting and pulling into the shapes of snakes, basilisks and dragons.

Modern Zoology dates from Gesner's *Historia animalium* and the great French comparative anatomist Georges Cuvier (1769-1832), the staunch defender of the fixity of species, called Gesner (1516-1565) "the German Pliny."

A disciple of Gesner was Ulysis Aldrovandi (1522?-1605?), who authored the largest collective work (13 volumes) on animals ever published, and who excelled his master "in bulk" but "did not equal him in quality," according to the historians of science, W.T. Sedgwick and H.W. Tyler. Aldrovandi is mentioned here primarily because of his inclusion of the sea bishop in his posthumously published volume *Opera omnia: Serpentum et dranconum historiae* (Frankfurt, 1640).

[3]W.M.S. and F.S. Russell, "The Origin of the Sea Bishop," *Folklore* 86 (1975), pp. 94-98.

[4]The Russells (p. 95), supporting their opinion that Rondelet was a critical yet open-minded scientist, translated his Latin on a specific point:

> I knowingly omit several things which were told me about this monster, because I think they are fabulous. I present the image of the monster altogether the way I received it. Whether it is true or not, I neither affirm nor deny.

[5]*op. cit.* Russell, Plate I *(De Pisce Episcopi habitu).* Rondelet's p. 494 (1554), herein reproduced as Figure 1. Also see R. Barber and A. Riches, *A Dictionary of Fabulous Beasts,* (New York, 1971), p. 26.

[6]*op. cit.*, p. 95.

[7]R. Carrington, *Mermaids and Mastodons: A Book of Natural and Unnatural History* (London, 1957), pp. 60-63.

[8]From the work of U. Aldrovandi of Bologna, as noted in (2) above.

[9]The Russells (Plate II) demonstrate the Jenny Haniver they made, using *Raja clavata,* concluding that there is a "striking resemblance" between their specimen and Rondelet's picture of the sea bishop (p. 97).

[10]R. Barber and A. Riches, p. 26.

[11]The story of the giant squid in Newfoundland coastal waters is told in F. Aldrich and E. Brown, "The Giant Squid in Newfoundland" in the *Newfoundland Quarterly* LXV: 3 (1967), 4-8. Scientific explanation of the every third decade cycle of strandings on the shores is the subject by F. Aldrich, in "The Distribution of Giant Squids (Cephalopoda, Architeuthidea) in the North Atlantic and Particularly About the Shores of Newfoundland." *Sarsia* 34 (1968), 393-398.

[12]For more details on Architeuthid as kraken, sea serpent and as a reasonable interpretation of Homer's Scylla, see F. Aldrich and L.M. Sullivan, "And on the Fifth Day, the Kraken Waked — and Odysseus Wept" in *Proceedings of the Conference on Creatures of Legendry, University of Nebraska at Omaha 27 September — 1 October, 1978* (in press).

[13]H.P. Beck, *Folklore and the Sea* (Middletown, Conn., 1973), p. 229.

[14]J. Steenstrup, "Oplysninger om Atlanterhavets Colassale Blaeksprutter." [Several Particulars about the Giant Cuttlefishes of the Atlantic Ocean.] Forh. Skand Naturf. 7 Mote 1857: 182-185. In: *The Cephalopod Papers of Japetus Steenstrup. A translation into English* by A. Volsoe, J. Knudsen and W. Rees. (Copenhagen, 1962), pp. 17-19.